

CHAPTER I

*Introduction***1.1 Preposition placement in English**

This book is about prepositions, and more specifically prepositions placed in *stranded position* at the end of a clause or sentence, a syntactic arrangement known as *preposition stranding* (henceforth P-stranding). It is about history, usage and precept: history in that it will trace the history of P-stranding over four centuries, from 1500 to 1900; usage in that it will analyse empirical data from two usage corpora; and precept in that it will assess the influence of normative comments on actual language use, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The starting point is the preposition itself. In present-day reference grammars, prepositions are described as a part of speech which expresses a relation between two entities; prepositions are links which, unlike adverbs or particles, govern another element in the clause with which they are syntactically and notionally related; and they correspond to case inflections in other languages such as German and Latin (see Quirk *et al.* 1985: §§9.1–3; Biber *et al.* 1999: §2.4.5; Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 7.§4.1). One might think that the definition of *preposition* in early grammars would be broadly a matter of consensus, yet the following are some definitions from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century grammar books:¹

- (1) A Preposition is a part of speech set before other parts; either in Apposition, or Composition. (Wharton 1654: 58)²
- (2) A Preposition (the third Kind of Particles) is a Word set before others; either to govern them; as Alexander *travelled into* Persia; or else in Composition with them; as, *The Conclusion will shew the Truth*, &c. . . . Prepositions are so called, because they are put

¹ See further Michael (1970: 65–7), Vorlat (1975: 401–9), Dons (2004: 137–40).

² Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are reproduced as in the original source. Emphasis is indicated with bold type.

before other Parts of Speech, to describe their State, Place, Circumstances, Ends, or Ways of acting or suffering.

(Saxon 1737: 75–6)

- (3) Prepositions are placed before other words, to express a certain connection, or relation; chiefly as to either their real, or ideal place; as, *by* him. They serve also to express those relations, which in the learned languages are called cases, as, *of him, to him*. (Brittain 1788: 69)

In addition to the notional/semantic unity between the preposition and the word governed, early historical grammars often draw attention to the syntactic position of the preposition, even when it is discussed in sections on etymology/morphology. In *An Essay towards Practical Grammar*, for example, the grammarian James Greenwood (d. 1737) writes:

- (4) Q: What is a preposition?
A: A *Preposition* is a Part of Speech, which being added to any other Part of Speech, serves to mark or signifie their State or Reference to each other.

Q: *Whence comes the Word Preposition?*

A: From *Præponere* to set or put before. Because it is for the most Part set before Words, tho' it sometimes is set after them.

(Greenwood 1711: 93)

Although a preposition in post-position is as much a preposition as one placed in front position (cf. Latin *tenuis, versus*), the emphasis on placement is a natural consequence of harmonising the definition with the etymology of the term: from Latin *præpositiōn*, past participle of *præponere*, it literally means 'placed in front': *præ/pre* 'before' + *positiō/position* 'position'. In fact, prepositions were sometimes called 'fore-placed words' (Gildon and Brightland 1712: 62; Collyer 1735: 40). As the philologist Henry Sweet (1845–1912) observed, '[i]n some grammars the definitions of the parts of speech are literally nothing more than quibbling etymologies' (1892: I.vii). Usually, the preposition is indeed placed *before* the word it governs, literally in *pre*-position, but it is one of the very oldest peculiarities of word order in the English language that prepositions may, and often do, occur in *post*-position, that is, after the governed word. This is in fact the usual word order in Old English with personal pronouns, as illustrated

et al. (1985: §9.6) and Sundby *et al.* (1991: 426–8); and *detached* in Onions (1911: §112), Curme (1931–5: III.xxix.62) and Traugott (1992: 281). Stranded prepositions are also referred to variously as prepositions placed at the end, end-placed prepositions, final prepositions and prepositions placed last. Poutsma (1914–29: I.i.viii. §§86–93) also refers to P-stranding as ‘the shifting of the preposition’. The ability of a preposition to appear in stranded position is referred to as *strandability*; the terms *strandable* and *unstrandable* prepositions are likewise used in this sense (Takami 1988).

The following sentences illustrate the array of present-day English contexts in which we can find P-stranding; the stranded preposition is marked out in bold, and the type of clause is indicated on the right:⁶

- (7) Preposition stranding
- | | | |
|----|--|------------------------------|
| a. | The evening course which I referred to earlier is no longer available. | <i>wh</i> -relative |
| b. | The bird that I was running after managed to escape. | <i>that</i> -relative |
| c. | The house I lived in last year has been sold to my neighbour. | <i>zero</i> -relative |
| d. | My mum found such books as I had been long looking for . | <i>as</i> -relative |
| e. | Paul was laughed at during the ceremony. | prepositional
passive |
| f. | Who are you talking to on the phone? | main interrogative |
| g. | I don't know where this drilling noise is coming from . | subordinate
interrogative |
| h. | What a mess he has got himself into ! | exclamative |
| i. | We know more than people give us credit for . | comparative |
| j. | I have no friends to rely on . | infinitive |
| k. | The new boss is tough to deal with . | hollow |
| l. | The police found new evidence worth looking into . | non-finite <i>-ing</i> |
| m. | There are two books on the shelf. One I will set fire to , the other one I will keep. | topicalisation |

Broadly speaking, there are two types of clause. First, in some contexts, the preposition is categorically stranded: non-*wh*-relative clauses, including

⁶ In the present study, *it*-cleft sentences of the type ‘It was John who I talked to’ would be classified within the group of *wh*-relatives, and the type ‘It was John that I talked to’ as instances of *that*-relatives.

that-relatives (7)b, *zero*-relatives (7)c, and *as*-relatives (7)d; prepositional passives (7)e; comparative structures (7)i; infinitive clauses with a non-overt pronoun (7)j or as adjective complementation (7)k, also known as *easy-to-please* constructions, *tough*-movement, or *hollow* clauses; and non-finite *ing*-clauses (7)l. Second, there are contexts in which, notwithstanding some constraints, there is syntactic variation, and instead of hanging in the air at the end of the clause, to use Visser's (1963–73: I.§394) metaphor, the preposition can appear in front position, as illustrated in (8): *wh*-relative clauses (8)a, independent *wh*-interrogative clauses (8)f, subordinate *wh*-interrogative clauses (8)g, exclamative clauses (8)h, and instances of topicalisation (8)m, also referred to as *preposing*.⁷ The construction with the preposition before its complement is known in modern syntax as *preposition pied piping* (henceforth P-piping), a term coined by J.R. Ross within the generative-transformational model of grammar: 'just as the children of Hamelin followed the Pied Piper out of the town' in the fairy tale, so prepositions follow their complements to the front position of the clause after these have undergone movement (1986: 121, 126.n23). Pied-piped prepositions are also referred to as *fronted prepositions*.⁸

- (8) Preposition pied piping
- | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------|
| a' | The evening course to which I referred earlier is no longer available. | <i>wh</i> -relative |
| f' | To whom are you talking on the phone? | main interrogative |
| g' | I don't know from where this drilling noise is coming. | subordinate interrogative |
| h' | Into what a mess has he got himself! | exclamative |
| m' | There are two books on the shelf. To one I will set fire, the other one I will keep. | topicalisation |

The focus of this monograph is primarily on P-stranding, but P-piping is also discussed, given that the history of the two constructions usually goes hand in hand. It will offer a twofold approach: P-stranding overall, and P-stranding in contrast to P-piping. In terms of precept, my main concern is the conceptualisation of P-stranding in normative works and the attitudes towards prepositions in stranded position. P-piping will naturally be discussed as well, given that normative authors often refer to the end

⁷ I have taken the terms *hollow* clause and *preposing* from Hoffmann (2011: 35–6, ultimately from Huddleston and Pullum 2002).

⁸ I am aware that in the generative framework the pied piping transformation is not exclusive to prepositions. As my study is exclusively limited to preposition pied piping, *pied piping* and *preposition pied piping* are here treated as synonyms.

position in contrast to the front position, as when Benjamin Rhodes (1743–1816?) writes that ‘the preposition is sometimes placed after the relative; as, The man whom I spake to: but it is much more elegant to place it before the relative, as, the man to whom I spake’ (Rhodes 1795: 38). In some cases, though, a stated rule only makes explicit mention of P-piping, as in James Nicholson (fl. 1793): ‘The preposition should always be placed before the pronoun it governs; as, *with whom* do you live; *to whom* will you give that pen’ (1793: 60).

In terms of usage, I will examine the diachronic evolution of P-stranding in all linguistic contexts in which it may occur (see (7)a–m). The aim is to assess to what extent contexts with categorical and noncategorical P-stranding may have been affected by precept, and not only in contexts in which there is paradigmatic variation; such contexts provide a setting for a more conscious selection of one or the other construction and this may skew the findings. I will also trace the development of P-stranding alongside P-piping in contexts in which syntactic variation is a viable option (see (8)). Earlier work on preposition placement has focused on this latter approach, especially on *wh*-relative clauses, while knockout contexts with no paradigmatic variation have received less attention.⁹ In my view, if language users wished to avoid P-stranding because of the stigma attached to it, they would avoid it altogether by means of other strategies and not only in those contexts in which both constructions are possible. We will see later in this book how the writer John Dryden (1631–1700) resorted to a variety of strategies to avoid end-placed prepositions in all types of clauses (Section 5.3.1), and how the frequency of stranded prepositions in the correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu (c. 1718–1800) was notably low in all contexts, not only in those with syntactic variation (Section 6.3). The following extract from the transcript of a trial shows that, even in contexts where priming would expectedly result in P-piping, the speaker chose P-stranding:

- (9) [Sir Charles Russell] Yes. What were the symptoms *of which* he complained? . . . These were the symptoms *of which* he complained. I think you saw him, did you not, on the 19th, the 22nd, and the 26th November; the 5th December and the 10th December; and on the 7th March in the present year?

⁹ To give but one example, Johansson and Geisler (1998: 67) argue that ‘it is only in relative clauses involving *which* that there is a choice between pied piping and preposition stranding’; hence, their study is restricted to relativiser *which*, excluding other *wh*-pronouns (*who/whom*), *that*-relatives and *zero*-relatives.

Preposition placement in English

7

[MR TIDY'S EVIDENCE] But the prominent symptoms *which* I should attach more importance *to* than anything else are those I have mentioned.

(Trials, Edwin Maybrick, 1870–1900, quoted in Johansson 2006: 139; italics in Johansson)

By the same token, I believe that users who are fond of stranding prepositions because, for instance, the construction is natural and idiomatic would strand prepositions in any context and not only when there is syntactic competition with P-piping. Guy and Bayley (1995: 156) argue that 'preposition-fronting is itself optional'; in my view, so is P-stranding.¹⁰ By investigating all contexts, with categorical P-stranding and with variability, this monograph will offer a more complete account of the use of this construction, with the added perspective of a historical approach.¹¹

This is the first book to offer an account of P-stranding (and to some extent P-piping) during the early and late Modern English periods (1500–1900). Stranded prepositions have been discussed in histories of the English language but not over such a long and continuous period of time. For Curme, 'for many centuries the position of a preposition at or near the end of a [sentence] has been one of the outstanding features of our language' (1931–5: III.xxix.§62.4); in fact, he continues, 'it is so natural to put the preposition at the end that we have extended this usage beyond its original boundaries' (*ibid.*). Denison (1998: 220) quotes an example with stranded *as* which would previously have been resisted 'even in informal speech', but which has now become increasingly frequent in spoken language: 'An ordinary genius is a fellow *that* you and I would be just as good *as*, if we were only many times better [1985]'. Studies of historical syntax have shown that the effects of changes in Middle English can be observed from about 1500 to 1700, that 'at that time, the structure of the language was gradually established so that eighteenth-century standard written English closely resembles the present-day language' (Rissanen 1999: 187), and that English at the start of the nineteenth century 'was linguistically by no means the same as that of the present day' (Denison 1998: 93). This book will thus investigate the diachronic evolution of P-stranding in the four centuries from 1500 to 1900, and will ask whether the well-attested spread in its use during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Görlach 1991: 107), and from 1776 to present-day English (Denison 1998: 220), has been

¹⁰ See Guy and Bayley (1995: 155–9).

¹¹ Hoffmann (2011) presents a very sophisticated study of preposition placement in which all types of clauses are considered, but based on present-day English data. Hoffmann's work is primarily concerned with the linguistic analysis of factors determining grammaticality and trends in usage; my study is largely descriptive and focuses on the relationship between precept and usage.

a steady one, or whether P-stranding has undergone change, and if so when and why such change occurred. Hence, this study examines the history of P-stranding from the end of the Middle Ages, during the Renaissance, the Restoration, and the Age of Reason and Enlightenment, through the Romantic period and into the Victorian age. The principal focus will be on the eighteenth century, a time of unstable and shifting attitudes to language, especially with regard to syntax composition and prose style. Eighteenth-century Britain was ‘fascinated’ by language, from universal grammarians to matters of elocution, from defenders of Latin to upholders of grammars and dictionaries. English, as never before, became subject to various kinds of scrutiny, the object of the gaze of science, literature, politics, and philosophy (Stalker 1985: 41, Crowley 1996: 54).

Preposition placement, in particular the relationship between P-stranding and P-piping, is one of the most intricate areas of syntactic variation in English, and has been studied from different theoretical approaches, mainly synchronic but also diachronic: the generative and transformational framework (Ross 1986), theories of movement and deletion (Grimshaw 1975, Allen 1980) and of reanalysis (Bresnan 1976, Hornstein and Weinberg 1981), optimality theory (Heck 2004), the syntax–semantics interface (Riddle *et al.* 1977; Couper-Kuhlen 1979; Ziv and Sheintuch 1981), the functional approach (Takami 1988), the lexical–functional framework (Tanaka 1999), typology (Maling 1977; Dekeyser 1990), dialectology (Seppänen 1999; Poussa 2006), psycholinguistics (Radford *et al.* 2012) and construction grammar (Hoffmann 2011).¹² Attention has mostly been given to *wh*-relative clauses, one of the contexts which permit variation between P-stranding and P-piping. Bergh and Seppänen (2000) offer a historical overview of P-stranding based on a few selected studies. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2003: 75–6) examine stranded prepositions as one among fourteen grammatical features under scrutiny in the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (1440–1681). A series of articles by Johansson and Geisler have shed light on both P-stranding and P-piping from a variety of perspectives, including nineteenth-century relative clauses (Geisler 2002, 2003; Johansson 2006) and twentieth-century spoken and written material (Johansson and Geisler 1998; Geisler and Johansson 2002); the scope

¹² It has been argued that P-stranding is much more complex than P-piping from a language processing perspective, and that this could (at least partially) account for the fact that cross-linguistically P-piping is much more common than P-stranding (see a summary of the discussion on the literature in Hoffmann 2011: 56–9). Radford has hypothesised that P-piping ‘is obligatory in English (and universally)’ but also that ‘languages (and language varieties) may differ with regards to which link/s of a movement chain the preposition is spelled out on’ (2009: 236, quoted in Radford *et al.* 2012: 405).

narrows to possessive *of which* in Johansson (1995, 1997). Other studies on twentieth-century spoken and written relatives include van den Eynden (1996) on modern journalistic language; Trotta (1998), based on the *BROWN* corpus; and Hoffmann's (2005, 2006, 2011) meticulous multivariate statistical analyses of educated British English in the *International Corpus of English*. Yet there is a gap in the literature, which this book aims to fill: a corpus-based approach within the framework of normative linguistics and linguistic historiography.

Attitudes to end-placed prepositions will be the principal theme of this book. The syntactic arrangement with P-stranding lends itself to criticism (partly) owing to implications arising from the etymology of the term, noted above. As Philip Withers (d. 1790) firmly states towards the end of the eighteenth century: 'A PREposition, as the Name implies, ought to precede in English the Object or it's Representative. v.g. *The Man TO WHOM you spoke*' (1789: 389). The rule 'not to end sentences with prepositions' has become one of the most enduring shibboleths in English, and indeed still tends to top those lists of 'bad' linguistic usage bemoaned by guardians of the language. Reports on these myths of prescriptivism can be found in Burchfield (1981: 30–1) and Ilson (1985: 177); they are also noted in Crystal (1995: 79, 194, 366), in the 'language myths' examined in Milroy (1998), and in folk surveys such as '20 examples of grammar misuse' by the BBC (2008), 'Top ten grammar myths' by the *Grammar Girl* (2010), and *The Guardian's* style guide (2013), amongst others.¹³ The stigma is seen to haunt news copy editors too (Radford *et al.* 2012: 403, 11). Present-day reference grammars still refer to this stigma; for instance, Quirk *et al.* (1985: §9.6) refer to P-piping as the 'unmarked' option, as it shows the preposition in its 'natural' place (i.e., preposed), while P-stranding is the 'marked' form, the preposition being 'out-of-order', separated from its object.¹⁴ Görlach points out that from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries 'the preposition at the end of a sentence was a particularly controversial point with grammarians and literati' (2001: 113). What stands between the natural use of stranded prepositions in present-day English (PDE) and the

¹³ See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7595509.stm> (3 September 2008); www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/top-ten-grammar-myths (3 March 2010); www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/ending-sentence-preposition (31 March 2011); www.theguardian.com/science/2013/sep/30/10-grammar-rules-you-can-forget (30 September 2013). Attitudes to P-stranding are also a recurrent topic in the *Language Log* (<http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/>).

¹⁴ On the other hand, some studies have claimed that P-piping 'is not a natural option in English, but rather a prescriptive artefact probably picked up during schooling' (McDaniel, McKee and Bernstein 1998: 309, quoted in Hoffmann 2011: 79), and that 'the judgements of native speakers can be affected by explicit prescriptive rules inculcated during the formative years of their education' (Radford *et al.* 2012: 407).

early Modern English period (EModE) is the prescriptive movement of linguistic thought concerned with grammatical correctness and rhetorical propriety, reinforced through the codification of rules in grammars and dictionaries and through teaching practices (Blake 2002: 326). A necessary aim in this book is thus to explore the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social, historical and cultural changes that led to the normative tradition. It has been repeatedly asserted in the literature that the rule against P-stranding was invented by John Dryden and that the grammarian Robert Lowth (1710–87) propagated the shibboleth in the eighteenth century. However, to the best of my knowledge, such claims have hitherto been based on the impressionistic interpretation of specific passages, and lack an empirical basis. I will argue here that the account in the literature hitherto represents neither the whole story, nor an accurate one.

This book will examine the whole issue of the stigmatisation of P-stranding, based on quantitative and qualitative analyses, looking at the history of the feature in the early and late Modern English periods in relation to prescriptivism in the tradition of English grammatical thought. The aim is to assess, or reassess, to what extent the (late) eighteenth-century normative tradition had an influence on the use of stranded prepositions, whether it triggered change, or whether it reinforced an existing trend. The methodology draws on the comparison of a precept database of metalinguistic comments from normative works with a usage corpus of actual language practice from collections of texts in a variety of registers. On the one hand, this will provide insightful observations into attitudes towards and the conceptualisation of end-placed prepositions during the course of the eighteenth century, evidence for which comes from a self-compiled database of precept works (1700–1800). On the other hand, it will trace the diachronic evolution of the use of P-stranding before, during and after the age of correctness, as collected in two historical corpora – the *Helsinki Corpus* (1500–1710) and *A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers* (1650–1900). The evaluation of the evidence from both precept and usage will help us unearth the origin of the stigmatisation of P-stranding and will shed new light on the influence of prescriptive and proscriptive norms on the history of this syntactic construction. Findings will ultimately contribute to our understanding of linguistic historiography, the study of grammaticology and historical sociolinguistics.

The remainder of this chapter sets out the framework for this monograph – normative linguistics – and notes the neighbouring disciplines to which it aims to contribute. Chapter 2 discusses the methodology, with regard to both the precept and the usage data. Chapter 3 is